

Messenger

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Asha Wije tells of her experience with a new project in Wimbledon

A group of Adventist members in Wimbledon are busy with a form of outreach called the 'simple church', which was officially launched in the South England Conference on 28 October 2010, under the guidance of Pastor Aris Vontzalidis, the SEC Church Growth director.

The 'simple church' is not our brainchild, but the Adventist Mission department of the General Conference has adapted the concept for use in reaching religion-resistant people in such places as North America and Europe. Although the method is unconventional and adaptable, it may not work in every context; but it does have the potential to create caring fellowships where unchurched members of the community may be reached.

Pastor Vontzalidis makes the important point that: *'The simple churches consist of front-line missionaries: not those who travel abroad, but those who are based in the UK and focused on reaching an increasingly secular and atheistic population.'*

Simple churches are house churches, patterned in many ways upon the early Christian network of congregations that were raised under the ministry of the apostles,

especially as set out in Acts and Paul's epistles:¹

'Likewise greet the church that is in their house.' (Romans 16:5.) *'Paul . . . to the church in your house.'* (Philemon 1 and 2.) *'The churches of Asia greet you. Aquila and Priscilla greet you heartily in the Lord, with the church that is in their house.'* (1 Corinthians 16:19.)

The fact that they meet in homes, instead of church buildings or hired halls, makes simple churches easier to establish and relatively cheap to run, thereby freeing up resources for other lines of missionary work.

Wimbledon project

Simple churches may differ from each other but this is what the one in Wimbledon is like. The outreach emphasis (through which 'members' are found) has so far concentrated on support for the homeless, and visitation of the sick in their homes, hospital beds and nursing homes.

For example, those who support this simple church may be found in Central London on

Friday nights giving out soup, hot drinks and warm food, as well as toiletries and clothes to those who live on the streets: most of whom are work-seekers, from here and abroad, who are trapped on the streets by financial circumstances – but others are the victims of domestic violence or drug and alcohol abuse.

Although presently few in number, the members involved in this new venture are passionate about it. As one member put it: *Every time we go out, we pray that we will be the hands and feet of Jesus. If Jesus were here now, I think he would want to bring comfort and encouragement to these very lonely people. We pray with them, listen to their stories, and give them whatever encouragement and help we can.*

¹Bible quotations taken from the New King James Version.

If anyone is interested in finding out more about the South England Conference application of the simple church concept, please contact Pastor Aris Vontzalidis at avontzalidis@secadventist.org.uk or phone 07941094219 for further information.



Above: Aris and Sofia Vontzalidis of the SEC join the team on a visit to a nursing home. Right: Laden down with bags of clothes and hot soup, members take the tube into Central London.





SIMPLE CHURCH



ABOVE AND LEFT: LATE NIGHT VISITS TO THE HOMELESS IN LONDON

Simple Church launched in SEC

Simple Church was officially launched in the South England Conference on 28 October 2010.

Partnered with Adventist Mission, which is the missionary arm of the General Conference, Simple Church members are fundamentally focused on outreach and being connected to God and each other.

SEC sponsor for Simple Church, Aris Vontzalidis, Church Growth Director of the SEC, said, 'Simple Churches consist of front line missionaries, not those who are traveling abroad, but those who are based in the UK and focused on reaching an increasingly secular and atheist population.'

Simple Churches are house churches. Statistics suggest that 85% of Americans do not go to church on a given weekend.

SDA membership in the UK is currently 31,262 out of a population of over 60 million. Moreover, out of a membership of approximately 20,000 in the SEC, only 7% are estimated to be members of the indigenous population.

Simple Church has therefore arrived in the UK with an opportune suggestion for an alternative method of evangelism.



SIMPLE CHURCH WIMBLEDON



HOSPITAL VISIT



VISIT TO A NURSING HOME

There's nothing new about Simple Church!

Actually, there's nothing new about Simple Church. The model is based on that found in the New Testament network of house churches....

In Romans 16:5 Paul writes, 'Please give my greetings to the church that meets in their home.'

Philemon 1-2 states, 'This letter is from Paul.... I am also writing to the church that meets in your house.'

1 Cor 16:19 states, 'The churches here in the province of Asia greet you heartily in the Lord, along with Aquila and Priscilla and all the others who gather in their home for church meetings.'

The basic fact of meeting in homes instead of church buildings or hired halls immediately frees up time and resources for front line missionary work.

Simple Church Wimbledon

Every Simple Church is different but within Simple Church Wimbledon, such missionary work has so far included work with the homeless and visiting the sick in their homes, hospitals and nursing homes.

Late on a Friday night, Simple Church Wimbledon can be found in Central London giving out soup, hot drinks or a hot meal as well as toiletries and clothes to those who have found themselves on the streets in these difficult times. Most are looking for work but find themselves in the vicious cycle of having no job and therefore no home and no home so therefore no

job. Others come from abroad where the economic situation is even worse and yet others find themselves on the streets for reasons of domestic violence, alcohol and drugs issues. Regardless of the reasons for why they are on the street, however, these are our brothers and sisters. One Simple Church member said, 'Every time we go out, we pray that we will be the hands and feet of Jesus. If Jesus were here now, I think He would want to bring comfort to these very lonely people. We pray with the homeless and listen to their stories and give them whatever encouragement and help that we can.'

On Sabbath mornings, Simple Church Wimbledon visits an elderly man who has been left much weakened by several strokes and seizures. They spend a deeply spiritual time with him and also reach out to the staff in the home. After this they visit another family who are struggling with sickness and spend time praying for them and praising God together. The Church then come home and enjoy a late Sabbath lunch followed by a time of Bible study and fellowship to which their unchurched contacts are invited.

At other times during the week, Simple Church Wimbledon will visit others who are in need and they also offer their time and resources for other community projects.

How are Simple Churches made up?

Simple Churches consist of a maximum of 4-5 committed SDA core members who are on fire for Jesus and are called to reach the un-churched. In fact, Simple Churches exist for the unchurched people who are not yet in them. Simple Churches consist of lay members. They require serious commitment and unconditional love for souls.

However, they are also life changing. One Simple Church member said, 'I joined Simple Church because God has called me to reach the un-churched. Now that I'm actively involved in ministry, I see how the way of Jesus is addictive!'

"My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I too am working."

One of the great privileges of Simple Church is being able to meet and work with people who are 100% focused on Jesus and his great gospel commission. John 5:17-19 states, 'My Father is always at His work to this very day, and I too am working'. Can we do any less? Daily immersed in scripture and prayer, Simple Church members are seeing the world in a new light - as one big missionary field. Each neighbour, friend and stranger is a precious, beloved child of God - someone He wants to spend eternity with. He wants to tell them just how much He loves them and He is asking us to introduce them to Him.

Simple Churches are defined by prayer and are Spirit led. One Simple Church member said, 'It's exciting being a part of Simple Church because we really don't know where God is going to lead us next. God is in charge of our Simple Church and He is leading us to the people He wants to reach. All we're doing is presenting ourselves for His service and He's doing the rest.'

One Simple Church Wimbledon member offers this advice to anyone who's interested in forming a Simple Church, 'Meet and study the Bible and pray about it with like minded people for 3 months. That's what we did and God led us to the homeless and He's been leading us ever since. He will probably lead you somewhere entirely different - perhaps to different community projects, prisons or even ministry within families but the point is that He will be leading and He knows best.'

Simple Church in the UK is part of the Simple Church Global Network, partnered with Adventist Mission (formerly Adventist Global Mission), which is the missionary arm of the General Conference. If you would like to learn more about Simple Church, please contact the Church Growth department of the SEC or go to SimpleChurchAtHome.com †